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Susheela Abraham VARGHESE
Singapore Management University, susheela@smu.edu.sg

Desmond ALLISON

Siew Mei WU

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Local Coherence and its Limits: A Second Look at Second Sentences

DESMOND ALLISON
SUSHEELA VARGHESE
WU SIEW MEI
National University of Singapore

Our article takes up Joy Reid's (1996) proposal that "second sentences deserve a second look" in academic writing research and pedagogy. Reid's data and commentaries indicate that second sentences, the sentences following topic sentences, make important but generally underrated contributions to the (in)coherence of students' written paragraphs. Her study, in a U.S. university, found that English as a second language (ESL) student writers often developed paragraphs that did not meet the expectations of experienced native English speaker (NES) readers.

We offer a contextualized critique and partial replication of Reid's exploratory study. Our research, in Singapore, investigates second sentence writing by English-knowing bilingual (EKB) students, and the expectations of experienced EKB academic readers. A comparison of our findings with Reid's yielded differences on the same three prompts as in the original study. These results lead us to conclude that our student writer sample is interestingly distinguishable from Reid's NES and ESL groupings. Special attention will be paid to responses, both by students and by academic readers, which did not conform to Reid's expectations for paragraph development in second sentences. Our discussion pursues questions about local and global coherence in academic writing, including expectations about topic development, and suggests implications for an investigative writing pedagogy.

Academic and pedagogic concerns over the development of coherence in students' academic writing constitute a major and wide-ranging area of discussion and inquiry, across both first-language and second-language contexts (e.g., Abraham, 1995; Belcher & Braine, 1995; Clanchy & Ballard, 1991; Connor, 1990; Connor & Farmer, 1990; Connor & Johns, 1990; Flower et al., 1990; Freedman, Pringle, & Yalden, 1983; Hamp-Lyons, 1991; Kroll, 1990; Lautamatti, 1990; Leki, 1991; Olson, Torrance, & Hildyard, 1985; Raimes, 1991; Robinson, 1988; Silva, 1993; Swales & Feak, 1994). While a review of the literature on academic

Direct all correspondence to: Desmond Allison, Department of English Language & Literature, National University of Singapore, 10 Kent Ridge Crescent, Singapore 119260.

writing pedagogy is beyond our scope, we wish to signal the importance of the complex, often problematic relationships that develop between:

- writing and reading (e.g., Allison, Berry, & Lewkowicz, 1995; Campbell, 1990; Carson & Leki, 1993; Connor & Kramer, 1995; Johns, 1995a; Kaufer, Geisler, & Neuwirth, 1989; Kasper, 1996; Rosenblatt, 1988; Tickoo, 1995; Zamel, 1992);
- student writers and established academic discourse communities (e.g., Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Bartholomae, 1985; Benesch, 1993; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Johns, 1995b; Littlewood, 1995; Reid, 1989; Swales, 1990; Zamel, 1995);
- writers, topics and tasks, including different understandings of what academic writing involves and what academic readers require (e.g., Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Flower, 1990; Horowitz, 1986; Leki, 1995; Mustafa, 1995; Polio & Glew, 1996; Prior, 1995; Reid, 1990).

The literature exhibits a wide range of investigative and discursive approaches to these and related issues and towards their bearing on the important notion of coherence.

Our point of departure for this article is a study by Reid (1996) that focuses on the contribution of second sentences to the coherence or incoherence of academic paragraphs. Reid's focused review of the literature summarizes findings and suggestions from recent reading-writing connection research and from reading research and pedagogy that identify (a) the importance of prediction in reading, (b) contributions made by situational and rhetorical background knowledge to effective prediction of texts within a discourse community, and (c) ways in which writers of different cultural backgrounds and different levels of expertise may help or hinder effective prediction of their texts by meeting or violating audience expectations. Reid's comments emphasize the role of topic sentences in setting reader expectations for a paragraph and the less widely discussed role of second sentences in contributing to a coherent reading of paragraphs.

The concern of Reid's 1996 study is with the predictability and interpretability of writing at the level of the paragraph (more strictly, in part of the paragraph). Reid's review reflects the importance that many teachers and researchers attach to coherence at this essentially local level in academic writing. Without setting this importance in doubt, we would emphasize also the need for academic writing (and many forms of writing) to lend itself to coherent interpretation of a more global nature. For teaching purposes, this can involve attention to recurrent global patterns of organization such as problem-solution (Hoey, 1983; Connor, 1987) and patterns associated with more specific genres (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990). The question of how decisions at local levels may

relate to more global signaling is a complex matter, to which we return selectively in our discussion.

Another highly relevant theme in the literature is that of academic English as primarily writer-responsible rather than reader-responsible, following Hinds, 1987 (see Kirkpatrick, 1997). While we believe such a view is defensible as a means of describing and understanding current conventions and practices, there is always a danger that it may become a pretext for requiring uncritically that student writers learn only to *conform to* what is expected of them, as opposed to *becoming aware of* initial reader expectations as a factor to bear in mind when making one's writing choices. Citing Eden and Mitchell (1986), for example, Reid (1996) claims that U.S. academic readers will take the first sentence of a paragraph as an orienting statement "regardless of whether the writer so intended" (Eden & Mitchell, 1986, p. 417) and that these readers expect the sentences that follow to clarify and support the ideas in the first sentence. Such stated expectations begin to sound more like an imposition rather than a negotiation of meaning and discourse development.

We wish to take up Reid's suggestion that second sentences, the sentences following paragraph-initial topic sentences, "deserve a second look" (p. 155) in academic writing research and pedagogy. (Unspecified page references are to Reid, 1996.) Our interest in this proposal stems partly from a belief, based on teaching experiences and supported by subsequent inspections of student writing samples, that problems of coherence in students' writing indeed have much to do with how paragraphs fail to develop in ways that readers can recognize as advancing a writer's academic purposes in a text. We agree with Reid that second sentences have received relatively little attention in writing pedagogy and that they seem likely to repay closer scrutiny. Although our critique of Reid's study will express other reservations, we accept the principle that helping student writers become more aware of reader expectations is a useful pedagogic goal.

The case that Reid makes for the importance of second sentences in paragraph development is closely tied to notions of local text predictability and of the topic sentence. As part of an approach to encourage student writers to anticipate the expectations of academic readers, Reid endorses the conventional practice of teaching "the concept of the topic sentence, that is, the most general, most important sentence in an academic paragraph...[which] directs the focus of the paragraph that follows" (p. 129). Reid later acknowledges that not every academic paragraph has a topic sentence or a deductive organization and that some academic writing makes only infrequent use of topic sentences. She argues, nevertheless, that the concept of the topic sentence remains useful for readers of much U.S. academic prose and for inexperienced writers, including ESL students, seeking "to communicate effectively and efficiently" (p. 155).

Even if the notion of topic sentence can sometimes be useful in this way, we feel that students of academic writing must quite quickly be taught to question its

sufficiency. This is partly because many academic paragraphs they encounter will not have topic sentences and also because recognizable topic sentences can occur in other than paragraph-initial position. Both these points have obvious implications for writing that students may seek to produce, as well as for their appreciation of what they read. We take the view that students should be taught to investigate the occurrence and placement (or absence) of topic sentences in paragraphs that they read and to consider the possible utility and placement of topic sentences in paragraphs that they write and revise, but not to produce them unswervingly to order. We have no reason to suppose that Reid's own views are not broadly compatible with our position and note that her conclusion already warns against the dangers of "descend[ing] into controlled writing or teacher-based writing, neither of which is desirable" (p. 155) when seeking to apply ideas to practice.

The main concern we would raise with Reid's general position is that making texts easily *predictable* is not the only way in which academic writers can make the development of their arguments *interpretable* by readers. We suspect that there are important differences, not only across cultures using different languages but also within English-writing cultures, regarding the extent and the assumed interplay of reader responsibility and writer responsibility to ensure effective academic communication. How second sentences may contribute to paragraph development could consequently vary considerably according to choices made by individual writers and by discourse communities. This is not a plea to defer pedagogic intervention until some ideal future when research has been completed, but it serves to reinforce our argument for involving students in *investigating* ways in which writers use second sentences to develop their paragraphs, reducing the danger that pedagogic advice on writing second sentences might become unwarrantedly prescriptive.

There are two specific respects in which Reid's account seems to us likely in practice to encourage a prescriptive stance among teachers. First, the set of reader expectations for second sentences in her study is derived from a high level of consensus among expert readers about ways in which initial sentence prompts might be followed up. To anticipate some of our own results, we found considerably less agreement among expert readers, and this leads us to wonder what may lie behind the high consensus reported by Reid. For example, such an outcome might largely reflect shared values and practices among one particular group of composition teachers although we do not know enough about the readers in Reid's study to comment further. Second, the word used in Reid's account to categorize all second sentences that do not conform to a relatively narrow set of reader expectations is "anomalous." The use of this highly loaded term (even with qualifications) appears undesirable to us, as its associations clearly tend to exclude all such sentences from possible acceptability. Our study will suggest, in contrast, that some (relatively) "unexpected" moves can prove quite acceptable where they occur.

In order to pursue our critique through a process of investigation and reflection on findings, rather than by speculation alone, we undertook a partial replication of Reid's exploratory study. Our study, in Singapore, investigated second sentence writing by English-knowing bilingual (EKB) students and expectations of experienced EKB academic readers. (As a distinction between first and second language status for English is known to be especially problematic in the Singaporean context, our study treats Singaporeans simply as "English-knowing bilinguals," following Kachru, 1983, and Pakir, 1995.) Procedures and findings are summarized in both investigative respects. Our discussion takes up the theme of coherence in students' academic writing and briefly suggests implications for an investigative writing pedagogy.

REID'S STUDY

We now outline the study in Reid (1996) that provides our point of departure. To investigate text prediction on the part of U.S. academic readers, NES student writers, and ESL student writers, Reid selected eight topic sentences that she took to be characteristic of students' writing in basic writing and ESL writing assignments. These sentences were given to 27 NES and 45 ESL (self-reported) experienced and inexperienced student writers. The respondents "were told that each topic sentence was the first sentence in a free-standing paragraph" (p. 135) and were asked to predict and actually write the second sentence for each topic sentence. Six experienced NES academic readers were also asked to predict and write "the single most appropriate (the 'NES-expected') responses" (p. 136) for each of the eight sentences. Two consultants and the author reviewed the student responses and classified them as either "appropriate" or "anomalous," according to whether a second sentence provided "enough context and appropriate development so as to meet a reader's expectations" (Tedick & Mathison, 1995; as cited in Reid, 1996, p. 205). The responses were also collated into "frames" according to their function in the paragraph.

Reid reports that her results indicated that "inexperienced" NES writers sometimes used "anomalous" second sentences, but that ESL writers were generally less successful in meeting reader expectations, according to the criteria applied in her study. ESL "anomalous" sentences were found to be more frequent and often more obviously inappropriate than those of NES writers. Statistical analysis showed that significant differences were obtained on just three prompts (sentences about "milk," "parents" and "new year" themes). As Reid notes, too much should not be read into the quantitative information: for example, it tells us nothing about degrees of inappropriateness that coders may have perceived. The NES

academic readers in the study produced "remarkably uniform" responses with "quite similar" frames (p. 136).

Reid's paper discusses responses to each sentence prompt, notes some problematic sentences (mainly to do with required contextual knowledge), outlines pedagogical implications, and acknowledges other limitations in the study, including the specific sentence dataset and the small sample size for NES and ESL student writers. Reid emphasizes that any differences between NES and ESL writers with respect to paragraph development correspond to differences in cognitive style and should not be taken to reflect adversely on the ESL writers. Generalization from this exploratory study is also explicitly disclaimed. Reid records six ways in which some ESL second sentences were judged to be inappropriate (p. 161): (a) repeating/restating the topic sentence; (b) being only tangentially related; (c) selecting an inappropriate word from the topic sentence as its own main idea; (d) being even more general than the topic sentence; (e) contradicting the topic sentence; and (f) being used as a concluding sentence.

Questions Arising from Reid's Study

Among many questions that arise from Reid's study (including those noted by Reid), we were interested in several related issues:

1. How will the performance of Reid's NES and ESL groups of students in a North American setting compare with that of Singaporean EKB students? Initial expectations might be that EKB performance will be similar to NES students (because of high language proficiency), or to ESL students (because of cultural differences with North America), depending also on demands made by particular sentence prompts. Informal discussions with some of our colleagues also suggested that Reid's six categories of inappropriate second sentences were liable to occur in some measure in the course of these EKB students' assignment writing.
2. How far was the high agreement among academic readers in Reid's preliminary study likely to be replicated for other expert readers?
3. To what extent do other academic readers and writers find it inappropriate to continue paragraphs in some of the ways taken as "anomalous" in Reid's study?
4. How likely is it that some of the "anomalous" responses resulted from the nature of the task, in which people were asked to "become" writers of paragraphs they had not actually initiated themselves?

TABLE 1
Sentences Used in Main Study

1. Milk is one of the most important sources of nutrition for humans.
2. My most embarrassing moment happened in an airport.
3. Acapulco is known as the best city in Mexico for vacations.
4. In Saudi Arabia, parents have separate responsibilities for raising their children.
5. Spelling is one of the most frustrating skills to learn in English.
6. The facilities for students in schools should be improved.
7. Relations between neighboring countries are particularly important to harmony in the ASEAN region.
8. Cambodian New Year is the most exciting holiday in my country.

OVERVIEW OF PRESENT INVESTIGATION

Our investigation comprised a preliminary study with ten expert readers in the local setting who responded to Reid's eight sentences and four piloted prompts of our own and a main study of second sentences produced by 108 Singaporean students in a third-level undergraduate course responding to six prompts from Reid and two of our own. The authors designed the study, applied Reid's categories as far as possible to the relevant items, and acted as coders for both preliminary and main stages.

Our focus here is on aspects of our study that offer interesting points of comparison with Reid's findings. Our account is, necessarily, highly selective, omitting much of the detail in our research notes. We present an overview of what we did and then concentrate on the significant results we obtained on just three items (the same items as in Reid's study) when comparing Reid's findings for NES and ESL students with our data from EKB students. We also draw on our data to illustrate some of the tendencies that we observed in both expert and student responses to the task. Our overview examines the prompts we used to elicit second sentences, the teachers and students who provided the responses, the procedures for data collection and analysis, and the most salient findings from both stages of our study.

Prompts

In the preliminary study, the twelve first-sentence prompts comprised the eight sentences in Reid's study and four additional prompts. In the main study, we retained eight prompts, including six of Reid's first sentences and two additional prompts. We omitted two of Reid's original prompts on account of class time limitations for our study, noting that neither prompt had elicited significant differences between Reid's NES and ESL groups. The additional prompts which we designed to elicit argumentative writing are not discussed in this article.

The eight prompts in our main study are shown in Table 1. The three items on which Reid reports significant differences between NES and ESL groups appear as prompts 1, 4 and 8 in our study. The study also examines three of the five items on which no such differences were reported (prompts 2, 3 and 5). (As noted above, the additional prompts, 6 and 7, were included for other purposes.)

Participants. Our ten expert readers for the preliminary study (eight EKB and two NES readers) were teachers at university or pre-university levels working in Singapore. Nationalities included American, British, Indian, and Malaysian as well as Singaporean. Not all were experienced teachers; the range was from a few months (two tutors) to about 30 years. The teachers were not all part of the same team but worked on different courses. The group was thus rather more varied in composition than the expert readers described in Reid's study.

The 108 undergraduate EKB respondents in our main study were all Singaporean. (One Japanese national gave responses, but these were omitted from our data analysis.) The respondents were taking a third-level elective module in professional writing that is regularly taught in the Department of English Language and Literature as part of the English Language degree course at the National University of Singapore. This choice of respondents was partly an instance of convenience sampling as one of the authors was coordinating the professional writing module. Most students were double majors, meaning they intended to graduate in English Language and another subject chosen from a wide range of options (a frequent choice being English Literature). Most were in their second or third year of undergraduate study although there were also some first-year students taking the module. From a research perspective, it would have been ideal to work with first-year students only to ensure closer comparability with Reid's NES and ESL samples, but this was not practicable. Interpretation of findings must allow for the possibility that different degrees of exposure to academic writing may have affected assumptions and outcomes.

Data Collection. The colleagues who agreed to take part in our preliminary study completed responses in their own time and returned them to us, often with comments (which we had invited) on particular items or the task as a whole. Comparison between our preliminary study and Reid's work with expert readers requires caution as different data collection procedures were followed in two respects. We did not specify that the first sentences were to be taken as topic sentences as we were interested to see how far expert readers would decide to treat paragraph-initial sentences in this way without being explicitly instructed to do so. We also indicated that more than one answer could be given if desired. This was because we sought to elicit a range of expert reader judgments about acceptable ways of developing paragraphs rather than to constrain choices. We suggest

nonetheless that our readers' first choices can be relatively closely compared with Reid's data.

Our main study was administered in class towards the end of a two-hour session with a time limit of twenty minutes, which proved unproblematic for task completion. Task instructions for this stage specified that "Each of the eight sentences given below is a topic sentence, the most general and important sentence in a paragraph." This was added to ensure (as far as possible across different situations) that any differences we found could not be attributed to differences in the way the task was presented to students. The task served to illustrate aspects of text development and text (un)predictability as briefly highlighted in later class discussions. Pedagogic exploitation was not extensive as these students were already quite sophisticated writers, but the activity afforded a basis for comparison with other work on text predictability in business writing.

Data Analysis. A great deal of research time and internal reporting of our study was taken up in the process of coding the responses and attempting to apply "frame" categories that are outlined and briefly illustrated in Reid's study. Among the classification problems we encountered as coders were (a) responses that did not appear "anomalous" by Reid's criteria but did not conform to existing frames for acceptable replies; (b) responses ("blends") that appeared to combine elements of two acceptable frames; (c) occasional incomplete responses (mainly from expert readers) that could not be classified at all; and (d) occasional responses whose status (e.g. as a diversion from the topic or as a suitable preparatory move for topic development) could only have been properly assessed with reference to a third sentence.

Our solutions to these problems were as follows. Where necessary, we added a new acceptable frame to our set of categories (this proved necessary for one of the expert reader responses). We carefully discussed all "blends" and established criteria for deciding on their assignment to one or the other frame; where we found too many unclear borderline cases, we collapsed two frames into one. As a last resort, we also identified "unclassifiable" responses as a separate category. Such decisions and their applications involved a great deal of time to ensure that the entire dataset was classified in a consistent manner. Eventual numbers of problematic items were very few. Agreement among the three coders, for both the preliminary and main study stages, subsequent to the discussion process, ranged from 96% to 100% over the six prompts that interest us here.

A difficulty in reporting this work is that our claims about internal consistency of our judgments would take far too much space and detail to support adequately for each item. We are confident though that any significant differences we report between our data and Reid's have not been substantially affected by any of these

TABLE 2
Results for prompt 1:
"Milk is One of the Most Important Sources of Nutrition for Humans"

Raw data (Percent)	Frame 1	Frame 2	Unexpected	Total
EKB	74 (69)	17 (16)	17 (16)	108
NES (Reid)	16 (59)	9 (33)	2 (7)	27
ESL (Reid)	18 (43)	9 (21)	15 (36)	42
Total	108	35	34	177

Note: *Percentages are presented in parentheses.

problems, most of which arose on items where we report no significant differences.

For readers interested in our statistical procedures, we note that we used chi-square analysis for the main study. Our sample was considerably larger than Reid's was, making chi-square more feasible than in her study, but we still occasionally had to combine frames for analysis. We consider the resultant (small) risk of losing information about differences to be preferable to making unsound claims about observed differences but do not on that account wish to ignore relevant trends. We therefore follow Woods, et al. (1986) in reporting chi-square results with due caution in the single case where expected cell values still fall below the desirable level of 5. For the three items with significant differences, we report raw data as well as chi-square outcomes, which will allow interested investigators to apply other analytical procedures to these findings.

Finally, in reporting our findings, we use the category label "unexpected" to replace Reid's choice of "anomalous" since we do not want to prejudge the issue of whether an unexpected response may nonetheless prove to be acceptable.

Summary of Principal Findings

We now summarize results for the six prompts that were used both in Reid (1996) and in both preliminary and main stages of our investigation (refer to Table 1). For our preliminary study, with 10 expert readers, we indicate the frequency of unexpected responses, noting too how many of these were readers' first choices. We then indicate the most favored "frame" category (following Reid's account of frames used in her analysis). Apart from occasional observations, we do not give further details of the various responses that proved acceptable by Reid's criteria. For our main study, with 108 students, we comment briefly in words on the gist of the findings, with occasional examples. For the three items with significant findings (prompts 1, 4 and 8), we provide data

(Tables 2-4) and chi-square results. Other illustrative use of the data will be found in our discussion of the findings.

1. ***Milk is one of the most important sources of nutrition for humans.*** Expert readers in our preliminary study gave four "unexpected" responses, three being first choices. These four responses can be summarized as topic shift; restatement of topic sentence; and two cases not directly related to key words "important" or "nutrition." Seven expert readers chose Reid's Frame 1 (the first reason why milk is 'important' for nutrition) as their first choice of second sentence.

In the main study, highly significant overall differences were found on this item (chi-square value 15.33, $p < .005$). The figures (and further chi-square tests) show that the EKB responses differ significantly from the ESL responses in Reid's study, even more markedly so than did the original NES responses. Reid's Frame 1 is highly favored in the EKB data. Milk and milk advertisements are prominent in Singapore life, and many EKB responses reflected some knowledge of reasons that milk is nutritious (e.g., very frequent references to calcium and its contribution to the development of strong bones). It is interesting to note that four "unexpected" answers reflected other kinds of topic awareness as they suggested possible disadvantages of milk in the diet. An example is: "However, we must remember that it may have adverse effects on some people." These answers count as "unexpected" as they contrast with or (in Reid's sense) "contradict" the topic sentence.

2. ***My most embarrassing moment happened in an airport.*** Expert readers gave two "unexpected" responses, one being a first choice. One sounded like a new topic sentence; the other involved topic shift. Eight readers chose Reid's Frame 2 (setting the scene for the narrative about "airport" and "embarrassing"), which was the first choice in six cases. (We included indications of time and place or of place only in this category.)

In our main study, we found no significant differences with Reid's data for this prompt. An interesting qualitative feature for this item was the number of responses (25) that encompassed suspense-building and other preparatory intermediary sentences. (Two examples: "It was the last thing I could ever imagine happening to me," and "Being the exhibitionist that I am, it is inevitable that I had to commit my silliest mistake in front of an international audience.") Such writer choices appear likely to reflect some of the EKB students' interests in or experiences with writing a narrative. These 25 responses appear to us to offer acceptable ways of continuing the paragraph from the first sentence yet not to fall comfortably into any of Reid's existing frames. For scoring purposes nevertheless we had to group them together with other frames since we were not in a position to rean-

TABLE 3
Results for Prompt 4:
"In Saudi Arabia, Parents Have Separate Responsibilities for Raising their Children"

Raw data (Percent)	Frame 1	Frames 2 & 3	Unexpected	Total
EKB	53 (49)	17 (16)	38 (35)	108
NES	12 (44)	12 (44)	3 (11)	27
ESL	6 (15)	24 (62)	9 (23)	39
Total	71	53	50	174

Note: *Percentages are presented in parentheses.

alyze Reid's original scripts in the light of a possible additional category. It could be that our qualitative data here reflect a different response pattern that our comparative analysis has been unable to capture. Another possibility is that different groups of coders develop different understandings of the categories they use.

3. ***Acapulco is known as the best city in Mexico for vacations.*** Expert readers gave three "unexpected" responses, all first choices, comprising two topic shifts and one response, produced by the NES American teacher that (in Reid's terms) "contradicted" the topic sentence: "At least that is what many people claim, but I have an entirely different opinion." The issue of "contradiction" will be taken up in our discussion. Nine readers chose Reid's Frame 1 (enumeration of reasons for "Acapulco" being the "best vacation" place), including seven first choices. One other response, also a first choice, gave an introductory sentence for a set of reasons: "There are several reasons for this." This response fitted neither of Reid's frames yet in our view cannot be described as "unexpected" (and certainly not as "anomalous").

There are no significant results to report from the main study for this item.

4. ***In Saudi Arabia, parents have separate responsibilities for raising their children.*** Expert readers gave four "unexpected" responses, two being first choices: two more general than topic sentence, one topic shift, and one contrasting unexpectedly with (or "contradicting") the topic sentence. Six readers chose Reid's Frame 1 (immediate contrast between the two "parents") as first choices.

In the main study, highly significant overall differences were found on this item (chi-square value 23.28, $p < .001$). The figures (and further chi-square tests) show that the EKB response pattern for this item is quite distinct from both the NES and ESL groups. One notable feature is a higher proportion of unexpected responses for the item among EKB students, a matter that may reflect both task responses and academic goals of writers. This important set of issues is taken up (and illustrated) in our discussion. EKB responses are otherwise close to NES

TABLE 4
Results for Prompt 8:
"Cambodian New Year is the Most Exciting Holiday in my Country"

Data	Frame 1	Frame 2	Frame 3	Frame 4	Unexpect.	Total
EKB	67 (62)	5 (4)	3 (3)	15 (14)	18 (17)	108
NES	15 (56)	6 (22)	0 (0)	0 (0)	6 (22)	27
ESL	21 (49)	0 (0)	6 (14)	6 (14)	10 (23)	43
Total	103	11	9	21	34 (0)	178

Note: *Percentages are presented in parentheses.

responses in the frequency of Frame 1 choices only and are generally far removed from ESL choices.

5. ***Spelling is one of the most frustrating skills to learn in English.*** Expert readers gave five "unexpected" answers, including three first choices, all changing the direction or focus of the paragraph. Seven readers chose Reid's Frame 1 (reasons that "spelling" is "frustrating"), all as first choices.

There are no significant results to report from the main study for this item.

8. ***Cambodian New Year is the most exciting holiday in my country.*** Expert readers gave two "unexpected" responses, including one first choice: one general restatement of implication in topic sentence (no orientation or focus) and one extending and changing focus of topic sentence. Seven readers chose Reid's Frame 4 (intermediary sentence to narrow the "focus" of the celebration), all as first choices.

In the main study, modest significant overall differences were found on this item (chi-square value 11.00, $p < .05$.) For technical reasons, certain frames were grouped together for the statistical comparison. The outcome has to be interpreted with caution as one expected cell value remained below 5, at 4.55. Inspection of the figures in Table 4 (see especially the percentages) shows that different trends for this item arise mainly from the relative frequency of various acceptable Frames rather than in the frequency of expected to unexpected responses, which is quite similar for all three groups. Although EKB responses for this item might very roughly be portrayed as falling "between" the NES and ESL responses, a closer examination of the figures suggests that, even here, the EKB responses do not consistently occupy a middle ground but resemble NES responses in one way (the proportion choosing Frame 1) and ESL responses in another (the proportion choosing Frame 4).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Our investigation of second sentence responses of expert readers and EKB students in Singapore to prompts used in Reid's earlier study in the U.S. has revealed a number of differences with Reid's findings. Our discussion will focus mainly on these differences and on some of the implications to which they give rise. On the other hand, some of our findings are quite similar to Reid's, providing evidence that some response tendencies are common across different settings and groups of respondents.

Although we cannot be specific about expert reader comparisons since Reid does not report findings in any detail for that stage, our study indicates considerably lower agreement (more variation) than is suggested in Reid's account. A notable feature as seen in our data is the fairly widespread occurrence of "unexpected" responses, which would be classed as "anomalous" in Reid's terms. These include instances of what Reid describes as contradictions, in which the direction of a topic sentence is reversed, for example shifting from positive to negative effects or evaluations. Other forms of topic shift or change in direction are also found. Some readers, including people whose responses fell into expected categories, commented on the banality and lack of context of some of the prompts (including 2, 3 and 8 in Table 1). They also noted problems of lack of knowledge about subject matter (including "Acapulco" and "Cambodia") and other difficulties in identifying with the writing in the first sentence.

These preliminary results and reader comments confirmed and strengthened some of our reservations about the original task. The reportedly very high conformity of expert responses in Reid's original study seems likely in part to be an artifact of team expectations rather than to reflect discourse predictability *per se.* At the same time, other findings corroborate the likelihood of some of Reid's response categories (such as giving a reason to support a general claim, as reported for prompt 1).

Our study of EKB students found significant differences from Reid's data on the same three items that gave rise to NES- ESL differences in Reid's study (sentences 1, 4 and 8 in Table 1). As noted earlier, formal comparisons were not always possible for other items, and the "Cambodian New Year" item demands caution, but the overall trend remains as described. The clearest and most interesting differences, involving contrasts in frequency of unexpected responses, are on the two prompts about "milk" and "parenting" and will be taken up later.

The "English-knowing bilingual" (EKB) subjects in our investigation resembled Reid's NES respondents in some respects and her ESL writers in some other respects, but the overall picture is far removed from any notional "middle ground" between Reid's two groups. This can be seen from a review of the prompts on which significant differences were found in both studies. In one case (parenting),

the EKB group diverged significantly from both Reid's groups and produced a much greater proportion of unexpected responses. In a second case (milk), the EKB group broadly resembled the NES group but differed even more markedly than the NES group from the ESL group. In the remaining case (Cambodian New Year), the EKB responses were close to NES in some respects and close to ESL in others, making item generalizations difficult and suspect. We see this set of EKB responses as forming a third apex of a triangle rather than a point on a continuum, in relation to Reid's NES and ESL groupings.

The incidence of "unexpected" responses in the EKB data, by comparison with Reid's data, varied in interesting ways across the six prompts in this study. Unexpected EKB responses were unusually high for the prompt on parenting and comparatively low in some other cases (e.g., the prompt about Acapulco). Reid's categories of "anomalous" response proved useful for classification of "unexpected" responses in our data. These included occasional restatements of the topic sentence, moves to more general sentences or to concluding sentences, and quite frequent forms of topic shift, redirection, and "contradictions" or reversals in value judgment from the initial to the second sentence. Although some of these responses did raise problems of coherence in our eyes, we found that others appeared to work acceptably. We were particularly interested in the "contradiction" category, which for us raises considerable difficulties for Reid's view that any such responses are to be taken as anomalous.

Reid's use of the term "contradiction" in describing responses that work against the direction of an initial sentence prompt apparently reflects conversational usage rather than formal logic. There is, for example, no formal contradiction between the importance of milk as a source of nutrition (prompt 1) and a personal preference for wine, yet Reid's account cites "Even if wine is a better beverage than milk" as a response that "contradicts the topic sentence" (p. 142). Our EKB data also included responses that went against the positive direction of prompt 1 on the basis of other knowledge. An example was the response: "However, people have dismissed its nutritional value in regard to its fat content." While this certainly marks an important contrast with prompt 1, the two statements can still co-exist logically. We would prefer to see such moves as "contrastive" rather than as contradictory.

Contrastive resistance to an opening proposition is not uncommon in academic discourse itself. Opening sentences are not always intended as topics to be developed but are sometimes used to set out propositions, often presented as general or traditional beliefs or practices, that the writer will challenge. In an interesting contrast with the expectations of U.S. academic readers of student essays that Reid reports in her study, it appears to be quite widely supposed that academic readers of research paper introductions can expect to find challenges and counter-moves as part of the writer's business of "creating a research space" (Swales, 1990). We

have already begun to note contrastive moves in second sentences of seminar and conference abstracts (but do not develop this point further here).

Contrastive moves are not the only example of tendencies in academic treatment of topics that could fall foul of Reid's criteria for acceptable continuation of topics in opening sentences. Other "unexpected" answers in our data, particularly for prompt 4 about parenting duties in Saudi Arabia, arose from what appeared as efforts by respondents to broaden the discussion to considerations of gender role or of cultural background, including comments on the influence of the Koran or of past history. Two examples are: "This is not surprising in a country which has advocated separate gender roles for males and females," and "Such a conventional practice today dates back to the 40s, when the political system saw a major upheaval." Such answers tended either to be more general than the topic sentence or otherwise to involve a change in anticipated topic development. In terms of content and apparent intentions, many of these second sentences struck us as interesting attempts to engage seriously with issues at a more global academic level, in ways that remained readily interpretable, without taking the most obvious (but often fairly trivial) illustrative pathway afforded by "Frame 1" for this item.

Reasons for answers given in this study can only be advanced with caution given the large volume of data and the absence of follow-up interviews with individual EKB student respondents at the time of the task. On the other hand, the written comments elicited from expert readers already suggest some likely reactions.

Some prompts, such as prompt 4, appear to have been taken seriously although lack of content knowledge probably underlies many instances of plausible invention; for example, the supposed demarcation of the father's and the mother's responsibilities for child rearing in Saudi Arabia varied substantially from one response to another. For other prompts, certain answers may have reflected elements of resistance to the task or to a particular writing position that was being proposed or simply a desire to inject some humor into the proceedings. Many "Acapulco" responses (prompt 3) offer enthusiastic but often exaggerated efforts to write advertising copy for tourists. The EKB student who wrote "Millions of tourists flock to see this beautiful South-American paradise each day," while imprecise as to geography, was probably exaggerating numbers deliberately rather than naively; the expert reader who wrote "People from all over the world flock to see its dazzling city lights" added a note of humorous apology for being unable to take this item more seriously; many other EKB student responses were extravagantly phrased, e.g., "...provide excellent vistas for the bikini-starved and the pinacolada-thirsty." Other responses seem likely to reflect reluctance by the respondents to produce what seems to be expected of them (such as a dutiful elaboration of the nutritional merits of milk, following prompt 1) rather than an inability to identify these expectations. Our EKB data include the "unexpected"

response "Drinking milk is definitely more exciting than a glass of water any day," offering a (tongue in cheek?) comparison whereby even milk can be called "exciting." (Recall also Reid's ESL respondent who indicated a preference for wine.)

Some comments follow on task limitations. Reid's study took place in a context where "topic sentences" were explicitly taught to learners who then applied their instruction in building up written paragraphs. Useful as such modeling can sometimes be, it is not without problems, not least when points of departure for writing are not controlled by learners themselves. Each topic sentence in the task stands alone without a wider context or an obvious writing purpose and without even allowing respondents to rewrite the first sentence in their own ways. One of our expert EKB readers (a recent graduate) observed tellingly that it was "hard to think of second sentences which could follow the first ones 'naturally' when I can't imagine myself writing some of these 'first sentences' in the first place."

Our own use of six prompts from Reid's study was incidental to our main teaching thrust, providing a fairly brief end-of-class activity that afforded some points of later discussion. We still do not reject such writing tasks out of hand (and we note that much real-world writing is not fully controlled by the individual as author), but we do emphasize that they are highly artificial, especially as both the topic and the first sentence wording may not correspond to what a respondent would have chosen to write for herself or himself. We share Reid's view that further work (both in research and pedagogy) should look more at first and second sentences from paragraphs in authentic texts, notably in students' own writings.

Classroom observation of EKB students in our study suggested an element of mild impatience with some aspects of the prompts and task, as understood from expressive eye movements, grins and shrugs, and conveyed in later discussion. In the main, such reactions were not barriers to predictable task completion. Many responses followed expected functional patterns, such as giving an example or a reason to support a general statement even if some supporting instances were also a little far-fetched or exaggerated in content terms. These outcomes made explicit some of the writers' assumptions and current knowledge about aspects of discourse coherence. The limited and artificial nature of the decontextualized prompts was nonetheless evident to all and was acknowledged by teachers in later (brief) discussion of the task and the functional moves made in student responses. In some cases, indeed, the functional nature of a response may have been affected by a writer's resistance to the banality of the sentiment offered in a first sentence (see comments above on prompt 1). In other cases, writers may have tried to create their own contexts (such as a serious academic discussion arising from prompt 4), with the consequence that the second sentence "unexpectedly" introduced some form of contrast or change of focus into the writing. We would have needed fuller follow-up interviews to probe writers' reasons for their responses in order to confirm or modify these interpretations.

Our final comments very briefly address some pedagogical implications of this study. We believe that a particularly important set of issues arising from our data concerns how and when to prepare students for appropriately contrastive moves in what they will read and in their own writing. In our view, contrastive moves are sufficiently common in second sentences for them to be taught rather than proscribed in courses designed to prepare students for academic writing. At the very least, it is important for such courses to enable students to recognize what professional writers are doing when contrastive moves occur. We do not imply that these moves are easy for writers (at any level) to carry out successfully.

Space and focus do not allow us to pursue other pedagogical implications in any detail, but the possible roles of peer consultation, teacher-student consultation, reformulation of drafts, discussion of sample texts, and other activities to encourage writer reflection are extensively examined in the literature. We wish simply to re-emphasize the need for explorations in different contexts—what we have been calling an investigative approach—rather than generalized pronouncements arising from one context, whether North American or otherwise. Reid rightly states that generalization from her study is not possible because of various limitations in the data and sample size. Larger-scale studies in one context, though, would still not have provided a valid basis for extending generalizations to other contexts. Rather than aspiring to reveal general truths for application, claims about topic sentences, paragraph development, reader expectations or writer tendencies that are derived from studies in one setting (including our own) can more usefully suggest ideas for investigation elsewhere. We believe this comment holds not just for research findings but also for the design and the evaluation of pedagogical activities.

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